



Pick Your Path to Health

Make Physical Activity Convenient

"You just have to do it," insists third grade teacher Hope Ladipo. "If you have time to sit down and watch a couple of television shows at night, you have the time to exercise. You just have to rearrange the time and do it . . . There's no such thing as I don't have time!" On weekdays, Hope wakes up a few hours before reporting to her classroom at 7 a.m. She and her husband go for their morning walk. If the weather is comfortable, they go to an outdoor track nearby, or if the weather is unpleasant, they use a treadmill at the local "Y." Hope makes being physically active a priority and has found a way to make it "convenient" by making it part of her morning routine before going to work.

For African American women, physical activity is absolutely crucial. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African American women are at a higher risk for developing diabetes, heart disease, and cerebrovascular disease than women of other races. Exercise can significantly reduce, delay or even prevent the onset of these conditions.

"Any physical activity is beneficial," advises Dr. Urschia Mahring of Virginia. "Daily is best, depending on what the goal is and what the exercise is. Make it 5 minutes twice daily and add to it gradually. Make it a part of your body hygiene, as important as brushing your teeth,"

If you're like most women, your day is filled with responsibilities and things you just have to get done (go to work, do house chores, shop, keep up your children's activities, and so on). You probably are already doing more exercise than you realize, running around for your job, family, or during errands. The trick is to work in a few extra minutes of a more organized exercise program into your day. So how do you make being physically active convenient and add it to your already time-limited day? Mrs. Ladipo has found her way, now you find yours.

Steps to Take

1. **Make YOU and being physically active a priority.** There is nothing more important than your health.
2. **Evaluate your lifestyle.** Exercise or physical activity is only going to be convenient if it is suited for YOU. Do you prefer to exercise in the

- morning or evening? How is your time scheduled? Do you prefer outdoor or indoor activities? Consider doing several 5- or 10-minute activities throughout the day.
3. **Choose activities you ENJOY.** Once you decide on the most convenient timeframe, now comes the fun part. At least that's what it should be. There are so many types of activities that are good for you. Experiment and try something new (for example, yoga, water aerobics, weight training, bike riding, hiking, dancing, tai chi). Do you like structured activities? Join a gym or take a class. Do you prefer doing things alone or with other people? If you really enjoy doing something, you're more likely to stick with it. Make sure you have a couple of different types of activities-both outdoor and indoor-for variety and as back up in case of inclement weather.
 4. **Enlist or develop your support system.** If you have family responsibilities, make sure your family understands how important being physically active is to you. Their support will help you be consistent and stick to a routine. Friends and "classmates" also make excellent motivators.
 5. **Take "active breaks."** Take the stairs, walk at lunch, take stretch breaks at your desk-do some isometric exercises.
 6. **Combine and incorporate.** Exercise while watching television. Turn on the radio and dance while you do the laundry. Work in a garden. Take a trip to the mall and walk briskly while shopping. Make it a family affair. Go the park. Ride bikes. Play volleyball. Jump rope together.
 7. **Keep a log or schedule.** Write your activities on your daily schedule as you would any appointment. Schedule it in. And look at it everyday.
 8. **Start slowly and build.** Daily exercise is best. However, some people can only do three times a week or five times a week, or five or 10 minutes at a time. Every bit is helpful.
 9. **Be creative and realistic.** Join or start a walking club. Talk with your friends or co-workers about setting up an exercise program on the job if one doesn't already exist. One woman said her mother wanted to walk, but had arthritis with constant flare-ups. She bought a treadmill to use at home. "That way she could walk, but if she got tired, she was already home and didn't have to worry about getting back."
 10. **Be kind to yourself.** Sometimes things come up and you may not be able to stick to your schedule. However, don't get discouraged and abandon your commitment. Just do it the next day or the next time you have in your schedule. Consistency is most important and if you're consistent, it'll pay off.

You may find that being active actually makes it easier to accomplish the other things that are competing for your time "My mother's not one to sit still," admits Kathy, Hope's oldest daughter. "If she's not vacuuming, baking, or preparing lessons for her class, she's always doing something. I can hardly keep up with her. I aspire to be as active as she is."

You'll be surprised whom you can inspire. Make being physically active a part of your life. It will keep you and your family on the road to better health.

- Women's Body, Image, and Health, www.4woman.gov/BodyImage/, 1-800-994-WOMAN
- American Council on Exercise, www.acefitness.com, 1-800-825-3636
- The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, www.os.dhhs.gov, 202-690-9000
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, www.cdc.gov/nccdphp, 1-888-232-4674.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."